

CHAPTER 20:

# GANGS

**Juvenile Probation Officer and Caseworker  
Self-Instructional Manual**

## JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICER AND CASEWORKER SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL

### CHAPTER 20: GANGS

#### INTRODUCTION

There is much material available, both through written media and via the internet, regarding gangs and gang related activity.

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize you with some terminology of gang culture and provide information on gang activity. The most recent statistics compiled by the Michigan State Police indicate that virtually every county in Michigan--with the exception of a few counties in the Upper Peninsula--have identified gang activity. In the more urban areas, gangs tend to be the “historical types”; factions, whose heritage started with the “Crips” and “Bloods” on the West Coast, migrated to Chicago, then to Michigan. In the more rural areas of the State, gangs tend to be “white supremacists”.

This chapter is also intended to provide you with information you may be able to use to identify gang activity in your community, as well as tips to share with parents and/or community members in an effort to combat gang involvement.



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#### The Term “Gang”

There is no consensus on a standardized definition of a “gang”, but there is some agreement on the basic elements.

Maxson and Klein developed three criteria for defining a street gang:

- Community recognition of the group;
- The group’s recognition of itself as a distinct group of adolescents or young adults; and
- The group’s involvement in enough illegal activities to get a consistent negative response from law enforcement and neighborhood residents.

The centerpiece of early gang studies conducted by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin and which resulted in their “Social Structures Theory”; the concept that individuals may become involved in gang life and crime simply because legitimate means of success are unavailable to them.

Cloward and Ohlin conclude that young people are likely to join one of three types of gangs—**criminal, conflict, or retreatist**—because of differential opportunity.



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**Types of Gangs** (Cloward and Ohlin's typology )

***Criminal gangs*** are likely to exist in stable low-income areas where there are close relationships between adolescents and adult criminals.

***Conflict gangs*** develop in communities with dilapidated conditions and transient populations. When criminal opportunities do not exist, conflict gangs fight to gain social status and protect their integrity and honor.

***Retreatist gangs*** do not possess the skills to be considered criminal gangs. They retreat into a role on the fringe of society that usually involves heavy drug use and withdrawal from social interaction.

A gang that does not fit neatly into Cloward and Ohlin's typology is the tagger crew.

***Tagger crews*** consist of youth banded together to create graffiti. The main reason for tagging, which is a form of vandalism, is to gain respect from fellow artists and, more important, from members of other tagger crews. Tagger and Gang graffiti are discussed later in this chapter.



## **The Impact of Gangs on Schools**

According to the most recent biennial School Crime Supplement to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) National Crime Victimization Survey (2007) the percentage of suburban students ages 12-18 who reported that gangs were present at school during the previous six months increased 17 percent from 2003 to 2005, and the percentage of rural students reporting likewise increased 33 percent from 2003 to 2005. In comparison, percentages of both total students and urban students reporting gangs present at school increased steadily from 2001 to 2005 (20 percent and 24 percent, respectively).

The mere presence of gangs in school can increase tensions. Students in schools with a gang presence are twice more likely to report that they fear becoming victims of violence than their peers at schools without gangs.

Gangs can spread unexpectedly from school to school as students transfer from gang-impacted schools to gang-free schools, causing an unintentional spillover of gang activity in the new school.



## **Gang Involvement in Drugs and Violence**

Gangs are increasingly blamed for drug and violence problems. This is partly because gangs have grown in number and diversity across the nation, affecting both large cities and smaller communities. Based on media accounts, the public believes gangs are extremely violent, are involved in drug trafficking, are highly organized, and are a pervasive part of the social landscape. As the media continues to portray gangs in this negative light, gang members gain a reputation of being tough and savvy, enhancing their standing in their communities.

A number of gangs are involved in using and selling drugs, while others are involved in selling but prohibit use by gang members. Some gangs are highly organized, while others are fragmented, with individual members involved in drug dealing but acting independently of the gang. And still other gangs and gang members are heavily involved in using drugs but do not sell them.

Despite increases in the use of violence by gang members, especially if their organizational viability or their competitive edge in the drug market is challenged, much gang activity is fairly mundane. A study in Ohio found that gang members spent most of their time acting like typical adolescents—disobeying parents and skipping school.



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#### VARIOUS GANGS

The Big Book of Necromunda Gang Names:

[http://wiki.rpg.net/index.php/The\\_Big\\_Book\\_of\\_Necromunda\\_Gang\\_Names](http://wiki.rpg.net/index.php/The_Big_Book_of_Necromunda_Gang_Names) lists literally hundreds of different gang names. Below are some of the most notable:

**Bloods:** The Bloods were once called Pirus; the name continues but is not as prominent as it once was. They are a street gang founded in Los Angeles, California. The gang is widely known for its rivalry with the Crips. They are identified by the red color worn by their members and by particular gang symbols, including distinctive hand signs. The Bloods are made up of various sub-groups known as "sets" between which significant differences exist such as colors, clothing, and operations, and political ideas which may be in open conflict with each other. Other symbols and slang frequently used include: Bo—Marijuana, Crab—Crip, Cuz—Crip, Hood—

Neighborhood, H—Neighborhood, Rag—Gang Handkerchief, Rooster--Piru, Blood Ru--Piru, Blood Set--Neighborhood or gang, Sway-Boy--Blood or Anti-Crip Ups—Bloods, 187—Murder. Black gang members use colorful monikers such as “Mad Bear,” “Super Fly,” and “Killer.”



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#### VARIOUS GANGS (CONTINUED)

**Crips:** The Crips are a primarily, but not exclusively, African American gang. They were founded in Los Angeles, California in 1971. What was once a single alliance between two autonomous gangs is now a loosely connected network of individual sets, often engaged in open warfare with one another. The Crips are one of the largest and most violent associations of street gangs in the United States, with an estimated 30,000 to 35,000 members. The gang is known to be involved in murders, robberies, and drug dealing, among many other criminal pursuits. The gang is known for its gang members' use of the color blue in their clothing. However, this practice has waned due to police crackdowns on gang members. Crips graffiti often include "B/K" which means Blood Killer. The "B" may have a slash through it. Often any "B" or "P," standing for Piru, appearing in any name or word has a slash through it or is written backwards--all to "diss" the Bloods. Crip graffiti also refer to the Bloods as "Slobs." Slob Killers means Blood Killers. A diamond around "BK" is another way of saying Blood Killer.

**Latin Kings:** Latin Kings is a Puerto Rican gang that started out in Chicago. The Latin King colors are black and gold; gang markings consist of a five or three-point crown, writings of LK, ALK, ALKN, ALKQN abbreviations (or the whole words), and drawings of the Lion and/or the King Master. Latin King symbolism is usually accompanied with the name and number of the chapter, region, or city of the gang. The Latin Kings are of the People Nation, and therefore, represent everything to the "left" in opposition to the "right", which is representative of the "Folk Nation".





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**VARIOUS GANGS (CONTINUED)**

**Vice Lords:** The Almighty Vice Lord Nation (abbreviated AVLN, VLN or CVLN) is the second largest gang and one of the oldest gangs in Chicago. They are also one of the founding members of the People Nation multi-gang alliance. Vice Lord street gangs use a variety of gang graffiti symbols or emblems, to identify themselves and their gang 'turf' including:

- A hat cocked to the left side;
- Martini glass;
- A glove;
- Top hat;
- Cane;
- Five-Point Star;
- Saracen symbols of the Legendary Arabian Anti-Crusaders King Neal;
- Five-points of the golden star;
- Crescent moon (Teutonic);
- Scimitar; and
- Broken heart with wings—the heart with wings is a symbol of the Maniac Latin Disciples, breaking it is a sign of disrespect.



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**VARIOUS GANGS (CONTINUED)**

**White Supremacist Gangs:** Are often blatantly racist and homophobic. For example: ANP--American Nazi Party, WAY--White American Youth or White Aryan Youth, SWP--Super White Power, WAR--White Aryan Resistance, NSWPP--National Socialist White Peoples Party, NSWWP--National Socialist White Workers Party, AYM--Aryan Youth Movement, SRIW--Super Race Is White. Exhibit 20 shows several variations of white-power graffiti, including use of a Celtic cross as a white-power symbol. "WAY" stands for either "White American Youth" or "White Aryan Youth."

**Occult Groups:** Use alphabets, signs, and symbols whose meanings are not usually clear to the passer-by. Access to hidden knowledge unknown to the common person is the essence of an occult group.



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#### Tagger and Gang Graffiti

Graffiti can be petty annoyances by juvenile vandals, attempts at artistic expression, or signs that street gangs have moved into the neighborhood.

**Tagger graffiti**, or what some people call street art, are personal expressions of the taggers, and they are an end in themselves, not a threat of something else.

**Gang graffiti**, on the other hand, are intended to represent the presence of a gang. They convey a threat of gang violence in the neighborhood. In New York City, subway graffiti came to be known as “taggers” because they signed their work with their chosen nicknames or tags. To the tagger, the important thing was “getting up,” that is, putting his or her tag on as many surfaces as possible. Taggers often form into groups called “crews” and adopt crew tags. When graffiti are thought to be gang graffiti, they create the impression that the unknown graffiti artists are gang members, suggesting menace and violence. Gang graffiti tell police officers who is in what gang, what gangs are claiming what territories, who is challenging whom, and who is trying to move or expand. Gang graffiti can become dialogue between gangs and eventually a record of gang wars--from initial territorial claims, to challenges to individuals and gangs, to records of individual deaths. Graffiti are easy and cheap to put up and entail relatively low risk for the gang graffiti artist, particularly when compared to other gang activity. Even the risk of getting caught is not terribly threatening because legal sanctions, if any, are not heavy.



## **Characteristics of Gangs**

Characteristics in gang behavior can range from a poor general attitude to clear-cut personality disorders that can at times parallel the criminal mind. Caution is wise when thinking one can place all gangs into one behavioral category.

A gang member on his/her own “turf” in school or in the community may be openly hostile. Outside the turf, the gang member may seem likable, open, and friendly. But he/she has his/her own code and sense of fairness and can easily turn on one when the code is violated. This can often result in sudden noncooperation, or worse, violent retaliation.

The gang member is a good con artist and can easily manipulate his/her environment as it suits his/her needs. Appearance can be very deceiving. But, a gang member can also display poor internalizing skills, be chronically angry, resentful of authority, and can be an accomplished liar. The more violent gang member can be callused, remorseless, lack realistic long-term goals, be prone to easy boredom and have poor impulse control.



## **General Reasons for Gang Membership**

The primary age group of gang members ranges generally from 13 to 21 years. Interviews of gang members indicate that joining a gang is seldom understood by the gang members themselves, but can vary from brotherhood to self-preservation as listed below.

1. **Identity:** Gang members cannot achieve an identity in their environment, so they gain it in the gang culture. They often visualize themselves as warriors against the outside world, protecting their neighborhood.
2. **Protection:** Joining a gang in a community with several gangs offers considerable protection from violence and attack from rival gangs.
3. **Fellowship:** Studies indicate that a tight family structure is lacking in the home environment. Gang activity offers that closeness, that sense of family that is often lacking in the home.
4. **Intimidation:** Membership can become very dangerous at this level of “recruitment.” New members are forced to join by threats, violent beatings, and initiations in order to increase membership.

No ethnic group or geographical location is excluded. Unlike gangs in the past, we are seeing mixed ethnic and socioeconomic groups making up gangs. There is an ongoing struggle for territorial control and the lucrative drug market among gangs in our community. School personnel, parents and community members need to be aware of these dynamics in their schools, homes, and in the community at large.



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#### **Personal Reasons for Gang Membership**

There are a variety of personal reasons for young people joining gangs. These include: the excitement of gang activity, the need to belong, peer pressure, attention, financial benefit, family tradition, and a lack of realization of the hazards involved. This also is a way students with poor self-concept increase their self-esteem. These young people seek to attain recognition for their activities, whether criminal or not. Gangs supply that extra pat-on-the-back that they might not receive at home or at school.

#### **Gang Recruitment Tactics**

Gangs pressure kids into gangs by using the following methods:

- Peer pressure, offer protection;
- Threaten safety of friends or family members;
- Offer money for what appears to be simple activities;
- Challenge kids to take risks;
- Attend parties where gang related activities are occurring; and
- Family members already belong to a gang.



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#### **Early Warning Signs of Gang Activity in a Community**

Graffiti is a clear marking of territorial boundaries which serves as a warning and challenge to rival gangs. It is also used to communicate messages between gangs.

Youth hanging out around public parks, high schools, fast food stands, convenience stores, and other hang outs for teenagers. Frequent use of public phone booths by people who actually receive calls there.

Increase in crime – gang-related acts such as vandalism, assaults, burglaries, robberies, and even random drive-by shootings.

#### **For More Information**

A number of websites are dedicated to identifying and combating gangs and gang activity. You may obtain information, and link to other websites, by logging into the Midwest Gang Investigators Association website: <http://www.mgia.org>.

